



# Storefronts Vow to Stay Open

## Support for Rx imports grows

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Storefront drug importers became more defiant yesterday and vowed to stay open as support grew for the sale of cheaper prescription drugs imported from Canada.

Owners of Rx Depot and Rx Depot Canada stores, which help consumers buy drugs from Canadian pharmacies, vowed yesterday to stay in business until they were forced to close. A federal court in Tulsa, Okla., ordered the chain to shut down nationwide Thursday, saying the business was illegal because it imports prescription drugs. Federal regulators say imported drugs might not be safe.

Meanwhile, several area members of Congress said yesterday that they hope to legalize importing drugs from Canada, where price controls keep costs far lower.

Rx Depot of New York co-owner Mark Skurnick reopened his Miller Place storefront yesterday for the first time since last week's order.

"We are going to wait until we get officially notified," Skurnick said, adding that an outpouring of support from customers prompted him to open his doors again. "The seniors are either crying or cursing."

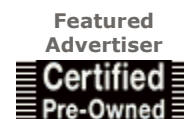
Russell Machover, who oversees four Rx Depot Canada outlets that have remained open since the judge's decision, argued that his stores were not affected by the ruling.

"These stores do not depend on Carl Moore," Machover said, referring to the Oklahoma founder of the Rx Depot chain and the target of Thursday's court order. "It's my decision."

But Moore, who has helped entrepreneurs across the country open their own franchises, said that despite Machover's assertion, the local stores are under the Rx Depot umbrella. Moore said the local stores should be affected by the ruling just like any others.

"I think it's very dangerous to do what he's doing," Moore said of Machover's choice. "But I can't control people. If I controlled it, he'd be closed down."

Machover and Rep. Steve Israel (D-Huntington) held a news conference in Bohemia outside



one of Machover's stores yesterday, supporting drug importation and suggesting the law banning imports would soon be changed. Although Israel refused to comment on Machover's decision to defy the court order, he criticized the Oklahoma judge's move. "The court's decision was premature and unfair and uncalled for," Israel said yesterday. "Congress is on the verge of changing that law."

"I think the federal government ought to be helping these stores, not chopping them off at the knees," said Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.).

Still other legislators voiced concern about the safety of imported drugs. "To me, there's no guarantee that you're not getting defective goods," Rep. Peter King (R-Seafood) said, adding that he would support a law limited to drugs imported from Canada. "Reimportation is too quick and too easy an answer with too many unforeseen consequences."

Both Machover and Skurnick are looking to change their store names, to avoid any affiliation with the Rx Depot brand. But Food and Drug Administration officials have said they would go after any storefront operation that is facilitating the sale of Canadian drugs.

For now, the local owners say, all orders will be filled and customers waiting for medications are expected to receive them on time. And for seniors such as North Babylon resident Sylvia Zuaro, that's good news.

"We need this here," said Zuaro, 67, who added that she saves \$375 a month by buying drugs from Canada. "We need it desperately."

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